

An Investigation into Trust and its Effect on Teams

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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
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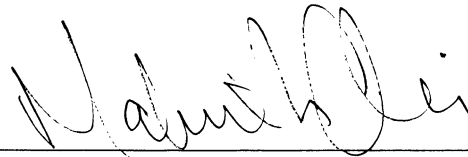
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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of the requirement for another degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of this thesis itself have been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mahwish Ali Bhatti', is written over a horizontal line.

Mahwish Ali Bhatti

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Table of Contents

Certificate of Authorship.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables and Figures	vii
Abstract	viii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the Research	2
1.1.1 IT Project failures.....	2
1.1.2 Importance of trust in IT projects.....	4
1.2 Research Problem and Questions	4
1.3 The Scope of the Research	6
1.4 Justification of the Research.....	7
1.4.1 Need for understanding importance of trust in IT teams	7
1.4.2 Need for analysing trust in IT teams	8
1.4.3 Need for empirical research on trust in IT team projects.....	9
1.5 Contribution of the Research.....	10
2. Related Work	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Past Approaches on Project Failure	12
2.2.1 Project failures in light of stakeholders and technological factors.....	13
2.2.2 Project failures in light of teams and their issues.....	15
2.3 Trust in Information Technology Teams.....	19
2.3.1 Trust and team performance.....	21
2.3.2 Trust and individual behaviour	23
2.4 Social Factors Affecting Teams and Trust	24

2.5	Summary.....	26
3.	Research Methodology	28
3.1	Research Approach.....	28
3.2	Data Collection.....	30
3.2.1	Unstructured and Semi structured Interview.....	30
3.2.2	Interactive interviews vs surveys, ethnographic methods, focus groups ..	31
3.3	Interview Design.....	32
3.3.1	Formulation of interview guide.....	35
3.3.2	Testing of interview guide.....	36
3.4	Data Sampling	37
3.4.1	Participant Selection.....	37
3.4.2	Data Management	38
3.5	Data Analysis.....	38
3.5.1	Content analysis	39
3.6	Ethics Consideration.....	40
4.	Data Collection and Analysis	41
4.1	Data Collection.....	41
4.1.1	Participation selection	41
4.1.2	Interview process.....	42
4.1.3	Data storage.....	43
4.2	Data Analysis.....	44
4.2.1	Content analysis	44
4.3	Summary	47
5.	Trust and IT Teams	49
5.1	Interview: Summary.....	49
5.1.1	Role of project managers and team leaders in building trust.....	49
5.1.2	Trust and individual behaviours.....	64

5.1.3 Effect of trust on team success.....	72
5.2 Summary	78
6. Results and Discussion.....	80
6.1 Research Questions	80
6.2 Formulation of a Framework.....	86
6.3 Summary	91
7. Conclusion.....	92
7.1 Summary of the thesis	92
7.2 Summary of the key findings	94
7.3 Contributions of the Study.	96
7.4 Limitation	98
7.5 Future Work	99
Bibliography	102
Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	115
Appendix 2: Sample of Coding Process.....	118
Appendix 3: Invitation Letter for Participation.....	133
Appendix 4: Sample Consent Forms.....	135
Appendix 5: UTS HREC Ethics Approval.....	139

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 2. 1 Literature review model.....	13
Table 2. 1 Social Factor Influencing Teams and Trust in IT literature	25
Table 3. 1 Division of Questions.....	32
Figure 3. 1 Importance of Trust	33
Figure 3. 2 Team's Trust.....	34
Figure 3. 3 Trust and Individual Behaviour	34
Figure 3. 4 Model for Interview guide	36
Figure 4.1 Framework for Data Analysis.....	45
Figure 5. 1 Roles of Project Managers and Team Leaders	50
Table 5. 1 Role of Project Managers and Team Leaders in building trust.....	51
Table 5. 2 Individuals' behaviours and trust.....	65
Table 6. 1 Problems with absence of trust	81
Figure 6. 1 Role of management and individual behaviours.....	86
Figure 6. 2 Individual behaviour and team performance	87
Figure 6.3 Role of management and team performance	87
Figure 6.4 Team performance and project performance	87
Figure 6.5 Framework for understanding trust in IT teams	89

Abstract

Project failures have become a major concern for researchers and practitioners. According to the literature, organisations very often give attention to teamwork as there is a view that it is essential for the smooth operation of a project (Thamhain 2004; Bubshait et al 1999). Therefore, teamwork is one of the important factors for the success or failure of a project. In addition to the importance of teamwork, team issues affecting its performance also need attention. Among these team issues, people issues are least discussed in the literature (Dirks & Ferrin 2001). One such team issue is trust.

Trust is believed to be influenced by individual personality, individual behaviours and interpersonal relationships (Hassanein & Head 2004; cited by Lumsden & McKay 2006). When it comes to the individual's behaviour, much of the psychology literature believes it to be influenced by various sources. One example is David (2007) who produced a model showing human nature, personality and culture among the sources that influence an individual's behaviour. Moreover, trust is deeply rooted in an individual's personality (Akhter 2004; Sutherland & Tan 2004). As the importance of teams has been stressed it is quite evident that the most important attribute that makes up teams, i.e. humans, has a strong impact on a team's trust and performance. Unfortunately, due to limited empirical studies on trust in Information Technology (IT) literature, the aspects of individuals' behaviour are missing and the studies from the psychology literature are not reflected in IT or project management literature.

The research presented in this thesis is an exploratory study and it introduces a framework to help understand how trust influences IT project teams. It also includes the role of project managers and team leaders in improving trust within teams. The framework encompasses the role of project managers and team leaders in building trust within a team highlighting loyalty, communication management, motivation, etc. It also includes aspects of individuals' behaviour which affect trust within a team.

A qualitative study was carried out to achieve the objectives of this study. The analysis of responses was done from six semi-structured interviews of IT project managers and

team leaders from two Australian organisations, gathered based on their experience in managing team projects. The individual behaviours found in this study that can affect trust, and consequently projects, were frustration, compassion, deception, transparency, idleness, talk (gossiping), inappropriate behaviours, inappropriate work attire, unnecessary disturbance, bad odour, playing practical jokes and an immature attitude. The role of managers and team leaders in improving trust within teams and the team members found in this study were to: operate with transparency, earn respect, maintain the flow of communication, promote team building activities, share team/project success, motivate team members, and keep the team united. The results showed that trust is a central element and without trust, teamwork will be negatively affected resulting in project failure and poor team performance.